

**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 5**

DATE: April 20, 2001

SUBJECT: Reports of Significant Developments and Activities
Ending on April 13, 2001

FROM: William E. Munro, Director
Superfund Division

TO: David A. Ullrich
Acting Regional Administrator

Bharat Mathur
Acting Deputy Regional Administrator

The activities listed below are organized by site-specific activities, other significant developments, training/conferences, and stakeholder feedback:

SITE-SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES

Emergency Response, JPitt Steel Melt Shop, Chicago, Illinois

On April 5, 2001, United States Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) On-Scene Coordinator (OSC) Benning responded to a reported oil release to the Sanitary and Ship Canal at South California Avenue in Chicago, Illinois. In addition to the oil, military munitions were also discovered at the site. The facility was identified as the JPitt Steel Melt Shop located at 3151 S. California Avenue. The facility went bankrupt in 1997, and has been abandon since; leaving various hazardous substances behind, including drums and containers, oils, asbestos, furnace dust, and slag. The military munitions were identified as 258 90 millimeter projectiles, which were assumed to be practice rounds. Army personnel from Fort McCoy responded to the site and were preparing to remove the munitions when the Army decided the shells were scrap and the responsibility of the property owner. Since the Army would not certify all the shells were practice rounds, the shells would have had to be opened by a private contractor before disposal was possible. Numerous calls to Washington, D.C., and the Agency's elevation to the U.S. National Response Team (NRT), prompted the Army to reverse their decision. The shells were removed and will be handled by the Army. U.S. EPA continues to stabilize the remaining threats at the site pending the signing of an Administrative Order on Consent (AOC)

with the potentially responsible parties (PRPs) to takeover activities at the facility.

Contact: Brad Benning (312-353-7613)

Response, Nichem Corp (also known as National Industrial Chemical/ North End Chemical), Chicago, Illinois

On April 6, 2001, Federal On-Scene Coordinators (OSC) Betty Lavis and Brad Stimple responded, at the request of the City of Chicago Department of the Environment (DOE), to the report of a release of hazardous waste at Nichem Corp located at 600 W. 52nd Street, Chicago, Illinois. DOE officials had received several complaints from the community concerning the facility. Subsequent inspections by DOE revealed numerous Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) violations concerning improperly stored hazardous chemicals and possible discharges. The City of Chicago issued a Cease and Desist Order to the facility on April 6, 2001, requiring all agents and employees of the facility to vacate the premises. An inspection of the facility by OSCs Lavis and Stimple confirmed the presence of RCRA violations. The facility was secured and no further actions were taken. Further investigation revealed that Nichem Corp, under the name, National Industrial Chemical, had been issued an Administrative Order on Consent (AOC) by U.S. EPA in 1999, requiring removal of drums and soil in a fire-damaged portion of their facility. The facility is currently being evaluated for compliance with the AOC and additional enforcement action.

Contacts: Betty Lavis (312-886-7183)
Brad Stimple (312-886-0406)

Response and Removal, Lake George Canal Site, East Chicago, Indiana

On March 22, 2001, an oil spill was discovered by Federal On-Scene Coordinator (OSC) Betty Lavis, U.S. EPA inspectors Ann Whelan and Beth Henning, and Indiana Department of Environmental Management inspector Doral Hunt while on an inspection of the adjacent Exxon/Mobil site. OSC Lavis observed a heavy oil sheen on the Lake George Canal and pooled oil next to the bank, oiled debris, and 35 to 40 dead fish. OSC Lavis opened an oil fund account for the site and, on March 27, mobilized the Emergency and Rapid Response Services (ERRS) removal contractor. When the ERRS crew arrived at the site with a vacuum truck for cleaning up the oil, the pooled oil and some of the dead fish had mysteriously vanished. There was much speculation about the

disappearance of the oil and fish (it had not rained, no one in the area had noticed a clandestine removal action). Lacking any oil to suck up, the crew set to work cleaning up the remaining oil with absorbent pads, collecting oiled debris, and placing boom in the water to absorb the sheen. Suddenly, one of the crew heard a noise and looked up to see a flash flood descending upon the cleanup area down the paved entry road to the site. As the crew scrambled to higher ground, it became apparent what had happened to the oil and fish, they had been washed into the canal. Further investigation revealed the City of East Chicago had a dewatering project underway in a nearby park and periodically released the excess water down the road way. A City engineer agreed to hold off while the cleanup was ongoing. The cleanup was completed on March 28, 2001, without further incident; boom was left in place to control the sheen on the canal. The source of the spill is still under investigation.

Contact: Betty Lavis (312-886-7183)

Response and Removal, ARCO/BP Site, East Chicago, Indiana

On March 27, 2001, while cleaning up a mystery oil spill on the Lake George Canal, Federal On-Scene Coordinator (OSC) Betty Lavis observed a heavy oil sheen on the canal which appeared to be related to the former ARCO/BP property located west of the mystery spill. Further investigation revealed ARCO/BP, under a Consent Decree with the State of Indiana, had installed a passive oil collection system on the property several years ago and was required to maintain permanent and absorbent boom across the canal to control sheen. The absorbent boom had not been changed recently and was so oiled it was releasing more oil than it was absorbing. OSC Lavis tasked the Emergency and Rapid Response Services (ERRS) contractor cleaning up the mystery spill to extend the cleanup to the ARCO site. The crew cleaned up as much of the free oil as possible and changed the absorbent boom. At a subsequent meeting with ARCO's Project Manager, OSC Lavis issued a Notice of Federal Interest to ARCO requiring them to maintain the existing boom, install additional boom to control the heavy sheen, and take whatever other measures that are required to prevent releases to the canal. U.S. EPA is currently negotiating voluntary actions with ARCO and considering issuing an Administrative Order.

Contact: Betty Lavis (312-886-7183)

TRAINING/CONFERENCES

Agency Participation, 51st Annual Chicago Public School Student Science Fair, Chicago, Illinois

On March 30, 2001, Barb Carr (Spill Prevention, Control and Countermeasure Coordinator) was one of four volunteer judges from the U.S. EPA at the Chicago Public School's 51st Annual Student Science Fair held at the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago, Illinois. The science fair showcases the best and brightest of the city's public school students in grades seven through 12 in science and technology. Students competed with exhibits, models, demonstrations, papers and oral presentations.

The theme of this science fair was "2001 Science/Math Odyssey: Milestones for the New Millennium." About 240 students demonstrated their knowledge during the science fair. Fifty of these were selected by the judges to advance to the State Science Fair and, of those, four will on to compete at the international level. The 200 judges for the fair were drawn from a database of 800 individuals prominent in industry, education, and research. Guidelines for judging exhibits and scientific papers were detailed in the judges' handbook. Corporate sponsors included BP, Kraft, and Motorola. Mayor Daley and Paul Vallas (Chicago Public School Chief Executive Officer) officiated at the opening ceremony.

Contact: Barbra Carr (312-886-7187)

Health & Safety 8-Hour Refresher Training Courses, Willowbrook, Illinois

Six Health & Safety (H&S) 8-Hour Refresher training courses were held in April 2001. The first three courses of the training were held on April 3rd-5th, 2001, at U.S. EPA Superfund Warehouse, 600A Joliet Road, Willowbrook, Illinois, and the latter three courses of the training were held on April 10-12, 2001, at U.S. EPA Region 5, 77 West Jackson Boulevard, Chicago, Illinois. A government vehicle was provided to be used for car pooling from the Metcalfe Federal Building to the Warehouse and back. Field Ergonomics training and Boat training were included in the H&S 8-Hour Refresher training courses for the first time.

Contacts: Afif Marouf (312-353-5550)
Jackie Dillard (312-353-8730)

**Conference Call, Brief the Region 5 States About OCEPP
Enforcement Projects, Chicago, Illinois**

On April 12, 2001, the Office of Chemical Emergency Preparedness and Prevention (OCEPP) hosted a conference call with all six State Emergency Response Commissions (SERCs) in Region 5. The main subject matter was to provide the SERCs with new information about the chlorine users project, the release reporting projects, and the toxic release reporting and the chemical inventory comparison project. All six Region 5 SERCs agreed to conduct compliance assistance for the facilities that are not reporting their chemical inventory to the SERC for the chlorine users project. The SERCs committed to either enforce if the company does not come into compliance or refer the facility to Region 5 OCEPP for enforcement. U.S. EPA agreed to provide the list of facilities to the SERCs by April 30, 2001.

Contacts: Mark Horwitz (312-353-9045)
Byron Maggos (312-353-8184)
Ruth McNamara (312-353-3193)
James Entzminger (312-886-4062)

cc: Barry Breen (OECA)
Steve Luftig (OSWER)
Larry Reed (OERR)
Larry Zaragoza (OSWER)
Craig Beasley (OSWER)
Michael Shapiro (OSWER)
Sylvia Lowrance (OECA)
Region 5 State Superfund Coordinators
Division/Office Directors
ORA State Coordinators
Regional Team Managers